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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 15, 2005

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JEROME COUNTY BENEFITS FROM \$16.1 MILLION DOLLAR INVESTMENT FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & WELFARE

Last year, Jerome County residents and businesses received \$16.1 million from Department of Health & Welfare programs that help people in need. The investment benefits every one of the county's 19,000 residents. Of Idaho's 44 counties, Jerome County ranks number 19 in per capita outlay of Health & Welfare dollars.

The investment of state and federal tax dollars amounts to \$852 for every man, woman and child residing in Jerome County. This includes citizens who may not receive a single direct service from the Department. The statewide average is \$839 per capita.

The Department distributed \$1.15 billion in Idaho communities in 2004. These funds came from Medicaid, additional payments to hospitals, Food Stamps, the Idaho Child Care Program, the Women, Infants and Children nutritional program, foster care and a variety of other assistance programs.

"This is an investment for all Jerome County residents," says Health & Welfare Director Karl Kurtz. "These are tax dollars put to good use because they are used to help people become healthy and productive. This money goes go to foster care for children in crisis, substance abuse treatment for adults and adolescents, improvements and operations at the local hospital, and dozens of other badly needed services."

"This is as much about sustaining communities as it is investing," adds Kurtz. "By providing programs that support people, we are helping communities and their residents build the endurance and strength they need to remain vital. Everyone profits from this investment, not just those who use Department programs. This isn't just me pounding my chest. That's what community leaders tell us."

Jerome County Commission Chair Veronica Lierman says, “Obviously, the fact that those dollars are coming in means they meet needs, so that doesn’t have to be met directly by the county taxpayers. We have a lot of pressure on our indigent care fund, so I recognize the value of the (Department) funds.”

Last year, the Department’s Medicaid Division spent \$13.5 million on health care for residents of the county. A large share of the dollars go to drug stores like R & R Pharmacy in Jerome. “Medicaid recipients in our area are a huge part of our business,” says Pharmacy Manager Tony Ross. “We are serving a huge need for our population. We fill 200-250 scripts and a big chunk of that is Medicaid. I don’t know what people would do without Medicaid coverage to help them with medical care.”

The story is much the same at St. Benedict’s Family Medical Center. The hospital received \$129,000 in 2004 in extra payments, called Disproportionate Share, to compensate the facility for having a larger than average number of Medicaid patients. “That goes into our general fund. We utilize it for general operations,” says Chief Financial Officer Kristin Goodwin. “It’s critical additional cash flow. Last year, we had a \$93,000 loss and without (the extra payment) we would have had an even bigger loss. The payment enhances our operations and our facility.” All Medicaid payments to the hospital totaled more than \$1.4 million.

Jerome County residents also received \$1.1 million in Food Stamps to help feed their families — \$150,000 more than in 2003. The number of Food Stamps clients served increased by 250 to 1,260 in 2004. The Oasis Stop N Go in Jerome redeemed \$83,500 in Food Stamps. Manager Justin Rector says the money is “pretty important.”

He says, “It brings in more customers who live around us. Our convenience store is in a neighborhood. It helps me extremely.” It helped him create another job. Including himself, there are six full-time employees and one part-timer.

What would happen without the money? “I definitely don’t think we would sell as many groceries,” Rector says. “This store has a wide variety from milk to canned goods to Ramen Noodles, and I think that would decrease the number of products we carry. By doing so, it would decrease the number of other customers. And it would cut down on staff.”

Department spending helps people, and it has an upside for business, according to Idaho economist John Church. “This is not lost money. The spending is an investment. It goes back into the economy. If an employer came to town and spent this much money we would be elated. People need to remember that a big chunk of this is federal money which is a huge return on our taxes. This comes back and helps stimulate the economy and it helps people.”

Kurtz says, “Not only is the Department money a human investment, but it creates jobs and maintains healthy businesses. These dollars recycle numerous times in each community and help us keep the high quality of life we enjoy in Idaho. This is a wise use of taxpayer dollars because the money spent in the community often stays in the community. These dollars are spent again and again to help create jobs and an infrastructure that provides healthy and safe neighborhoods.”

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(**Editors:** Interviews are available on request. Contact Ross Mason at 334-0693 or Regional Director John Hathaway at 316-0620 for more information.)

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investment in every Idaho County
can be found online at
<http://www.healthandwelfare.idaho.gov>**